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VENETIANS ROWING FOR THE OTTOMAN TURKS OTTOMAN TURKS ROWING FOR THE VENETIANS*

ABSTRACT: *In the long centuries of the modern age when the Mediterranean was crossed by galleys, a major concern for the navies was to obtain rowers in numbers sufficient to navigate their fleets, especially in wartime. The Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire were no exception, and they organized to meet the need. So even the corsair fleets of the North African Barbary states. When the free rowers were no longer sufficient, by both sides was provided, among other things, using – for the hard service of the galleys – prisoners of war and the unfortunate people caught at sea or during raids along enemy coasts. In this complex and various situation, the question of religious contrast was not always prevalent, stirring often to other more practical reasons of interest.*

KEYWORDS: *galleys, rowers, corsairs, slaves, captives, Republic of Venice, Ottoman Empire.*

REMATORI VENEZIANI PER GLI OTTOMANI. REMATORI OTTOMANI PER I VENEZIANI

SOMMARIO: *Nei lunghi secoli dell'età moderna nei quali il Mediterraneo fu solcato dalle galee, una delle principali preoccupazioni delle marine era quella di assicurarsi i rematori in numero sufficiente a far navigare le loro flotte, specialmente in tempo di guerra. La Repubblica di Venezia e l'Impero ottomano non fecero eccezione, e si organizzarono per fare fronte alla bisogna. Così anche le flotte corsare degli stati barbareschi nordafricani. Quando i rematori volontari non erano più sufficienti, da entrambe le parti si provvedeva, tra l'altro, utilizzando nel duro servizio delle galee i prigionieri di guerra, gli sfortunati catturati in mare o durante le razzie lungo la costa avversaria. In questa complessa e diversificata situazione, la questione dell'appartenenza religiosa dell'avversario non fu sempre prevalente, mescolandosi sovente anche ad altre motivazioni d'interesse più pratico.*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *galere, rematori, corsari, schiavi, captivi, Repubblica di Venezia, Impero ottomano.*

1. Introduction¹

The aim of the following pages, through the analysis of some cases and concrete examples, will be to present a picture of the events experienced by the *Venetians* who were assigned to row on board Ottoman galleys and by the *Turks* destined to the same task on board Venetian galleys, in the last two centuries of the modern age. A note of clarification: here and later, speaking of *Venetian* is meant to refer to the inhabitants of the city of Venice, but also, in general, to the subjects of the *Stato da Terra* and of the *Stato da Mar* of the Most Serene Republic (*the Mainland and Maritime State of Venice*). By the term *Turkish* – derived

* Abbreviations: Asve = Venetian State Archives.

¹ I am grateful to Maria Francesca Tiepolo and Maria Pia Pedani for their careful reading of the present paper and their valuable advice.

from the sources – instead, we will refer, for convenience of narration, to those who inhabited the vast territory of the Ottoman Empire.

In an attempt to furnish appropriate illustration in the general historical context of the time, it will be necessary to propose a preliminary representation – albeit brief – of the reasons that stood at the origin of this unique experience. Mention will thus be made to the phenomenon of corsair warfare, foundation, even in time of peace, of what has been called *Mediterranean slavery*, and that of prisoners of war, which was rather a consequence of officially declared conflict. Both events, in fact, represented the main source of the capture of men on both sides who were then sent to row on enemy ships.

2. A hot topic: Mediterranean slavery

Such a preliminary emphasis concerning the abundance, in recent years, of international historical publications on corsair warfare and *Mediterranean slavery* has become, one might say, a constant characteristic of each new contribution on the issue. The question is thus extremely current, and is in fact capable not only of arousing interest within the community of historians and specialists, but also impacting on a wider audience².

For the latter aspect, limiting the scope to Italy, we can recall some of the latest suggestions. The first is the beatification ceremony of the Franciscan Father Francesco Zirano (a Sardinian friar particularly active in redeeming Christians who ended up as slaves of the corsairs, and who was flayed alive in Algiers in 1603), which took place in Sassari in October 2014. Another, of a very different order, is manifested in the so-called *dramatized visit* of the rooms of the Pio Monte della Misericordia in Naples – once the seat of a brotherhood that rescued the *captives* – animated by the narration, using professional actors, of the vicissitudes of slaves and Neapolitan *redeemers*³.

² An overview of the titles appearing after 2000 in S. Bono, *Schiavi europei e musulmani (sec. XVI-XIX)*, «Oriente Moderno», n.s., 91/2, 2011, pp. V -XX; M. Bosco, *Il commercio dei captivi nel Mediterraneo di età moderna (secc. XVI-XVIII). Orientamenti e prospettive attuali di ricerca*, «Cromohs – Cyber Review of Modern Historiography», 18, 2013, pp. 1-26; M.P. Pedani, *Venezia e l'Oriente: note su recenti letture*, «Mediterranea - ricerche storiche», 31, 2014, pp. 397-416.

³ La Nuova Sardegna, *Era il 1579 quando entrò nel convento di Santa Maria*, <http://lanuovasardegna.gelocal.it/sassari/cronaca/2014/10/09/news/era-il-1579-quando-entro-nel-convento-di-santa-maria-1.10085324> (20/01/2015); Diario Partenopeo, *Redimere i captivi. La visita teatralizzata al Pio Monte della Misericordia*, <http://www.diariopartenopeo.it/redimere-i-captivi-la-visita-teatralizzata-al-pio-monte-della-misericordia/#PIX&ptask=DSP&kdntuid=1&SPug=true&predirect=http>:

Fine musical initiatives surround the true *revival* of this important glimpse of ancient Mediterranean life. Again in Naples, examples of Oratorios composed in the late seventeenth century by the master from Apulia Gaetano Veneziano to animate the community life of the *Congregazione della Redenzione de' cattivi* were rediscovered and consequently performed (in particular, *La Santissima Trinità impiegata nella Concettione Immacolata di Maria*, of 1693, has been recorded). Veneto responds with projects which are no less important; in Padua, in May 2014, has seen the interpretation, for the first time in modern times, of the Mass commissioned in 1765 by the Venetian Senate to the composer Baldassare Galuppi, to celebrate the return home of a large group of compatriots, redeemed in North Africa⁴.

Today, in discerning the form of *Mediterranean slavery* of the modern age from contemporary Atlantic slavery and ancient slavery, many scholars currently make a distinction between the true slaves themselves, on the one hand (which include those destined for the Americas), and, on the other hand, Europeans forcibly conducted into servitude in the Islamic area, to be defined as *captives* (not to mention the Islamics in turn abducted to Christian countries): «for these the possibility of redemption by money was more easily envisaged, especially for wealthy subjects and with higher social connections»⁵. The source of this particular form of slavery, the characteristics of which lasted for centuries (as has been observed, namely reciprocity, reversibility and fortuitousness), were the various forms of open or disguised belligerence, which for decades witnessed the opposition between the Ottoman world (in the broad sense) and many European states. Indeed,

//srv.juiceadv.com/pubmatic_sync.asp?&np=0 (20/01/2015). For a discussion on the adventures of religious Catholics in the North African area in the XVI-XVII centuries, at times martyred and later canonised: G. Fiume, *Schiavitù mediterranea. Corsari, rinnegati e santi di età moderna*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2009, 199-330.

⁴ La Sala del Cembalo del caro Sassone, Gaetano Veneziano. *La Santissima Trinità (Napoli 1693). Musica per la Congregazione della Redenzione de' cattivi*, <http://www.saladelcembalo.org/histories/gveneziano-santissimatrinita.html> (20/01/2015); L'Ape Musicale. Rivista di musica, arti, cultura, Padova, concerto Veneto Festival, 23/05/2014, <http://www.apemusicale.it/joomla/recensioni/516-padova-concerto-veneto-festival-23-05-2014?highlight=WyJnYWx1cHBpIl0=> (20/01/2015).

⁵ S. Bono, *Schiavi europei, ottomano-maghrebini, neri e altri nel mondo mediterraneo. Un confronto (XVI-XIX secolo)*, in S. Hanss, J. Schiel, *Mediterranean slavery revisited (500-1800)*, Chronos, Zürich, 2014, pp. 445-471, in particular pp. 450, 448-451; S. Marzagalli, review to *Schiavi europei e musulmani d'Oltralpe (sec. XVI-XIX), dossier thématique sous la direction de Salvatore Bono, «Oriente moderno»*, vol. XCI, n. 2, 2011, pp. V-XX, 161-240, «Cahiers de la Méditerranée», 87, 2013, pp. 409-411.

si riducevano in schiavitù non solo i combattenti nemici catturati, ma anche popolazioni civili coinvolte in quelle vicende; alle operazioni militari [...] si aggiunsero [...] le operazioni della guerra corsara, da ambedue le parti, mosse dall'intento principale di catturare uomini da porre al remo e in generale popolazione da ridurre in schiavitù⁶.

(Not only captured enemy combatants were reduced to slavery, but also civilian populations involved in those events; to military operations [...] were added [...] the operations of corsair war, on both sides, moved by the main intention to capture men to use at the oar and in general population to be reduced to slavery).

That said, it must be stated, however, that in the sources – and, for the particular interest of this paper, in the Venetian sources – an indication of *slave* is found to identify each Venetian or Venetian subject deprived of his liberty by entities generically referring to the Islamic world, whether he had been seized at sea or by corsair raid, or instead captured during one of the episodes of war that opposed Venice to the Ottoman Empire and its allies. The factor that had given rise to captivity did not in fact have any particular influence on the subsequent approach to the problem by the authorities, nor did it condition the captors when they had to decide the arrangement to be applied to their human prey.

Concerning the first aspect, as regards Venice, it can be noted that the *cassa schiavi* (i.e. slave fund), existing in the Venetian Mint in support of compatriots in captivity and managed by the *Provveditori sopra ospedali e luoghi pii e riscatto degli schiavi* (i.e. *Superintendents of hospitals and charitable institutions and redemption of slaves*), collected sums allocated to facilitate the release of those who had indifferently fallen into slavery. All these were nevertheless subject, before materially receiving the contribution allocated to them – and only after repatriation had taken place – to undergo the same, complex, verification and clarifying procedure of the situation they claimed to have suffered⁷.

On the second point, the common destiny of the Venetians who fell into Ottoman hands (in war), or in the Barbaresque states (even during peace between the Most Serene Republic of Venice and the Sublime Porte) was mostly that of rowing on the galleys of the Sultans or North Africans. The *bagnio* of Constantinople, or those of Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis witnessed over the centuries the constant presence of large numbers of Venetian subjects from all walks of life and of all ages (the last

⁶ S. Bono, *Schiavi europei* cit., 446-447, 449.

⁷ On the redemption of Venetian slaves: R.C. Davis, *Slave redemption in Venice 1585-1797*, in J.J. Martin, D. Romano, *Venice reconsidered: the history and civilization of an Italian city-state, 1297-1797*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2002, pp. 454-487; A. Pelizza, *Riammessi a respirare l'aria tranquilla. Venezia e il riscatto degli schiavi in età moderna*, Ivsla, Venezia, 2013.

P A R T E
P R E S E
Nell' Eccellentifs. Senato

In diuersi tempi, in proposito de ritrouar danari per la recuperatione de miseri Schiaui, che s'atrouano in mano de Turchi.

Et dell' ordine, che deuono tenir l' Illustriffimi Signori Proueditori sopra li Hospedali per far la detta recuperatione.

Con vna Terminatione di effi Illustrifs. Signori Proueditori, fatta per la debita effecutione delle Parti predette, da mandarfi alli Rettori di Terra ferma, accioche quelle facciano essequire.

1586. 19. Febraro, & 1614. 15. Febraro.



Stampati per Antonio Plnelli,
Stampator Ducale.
A S. Maria Formosa, in Cale del Mondo Nouo.

Disposizioni per il riscatto degli schiavi veneziani, sec. XVII
(ASVe, Compilazione delle leggi, b. 341, Fascicolo a stampa, sec. XVII.

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three cities were home to the so-called *Barbary regencies*, particularly active in corsair warfare on the Islamic side, along with Morocco and the town of Dulcigno-Ulcinj, a coastal town of modern-day Montenegro, on the border with Albania).

We will see how the same role was assigned, reversely, to the *Turks* captured in war by the Venetians.

3. The conditions of the *galley slaves*

The condition of those subject to bondage was, in general terms, as we have said, hard. Many, however, on both sides, were the degrees and *nuances*. Apart from the case, by now well studied, of the so-called *renegados*, i.e. those who abandoned their religion of origin in an effort to improve their condition and to adapt more effectively to a society and environment common to the places in which they were conducted⁸, those who instead remained slaves were destined to various activities; which could consist in construction work, domestic service, or even in cultivating the fields.

The majority of those who remained available to the public authorities, however, that is the *schiaivi di publica ragione*, to use the terminology of Venice, during the warmer months were assigned to rowing on the galleys, the famous ships powered by oars, characteristic of all Mediterranean fleets from the Middle Ages until the early nineteenth century.

Violence, oppression, starvation and exhausting toil are the characteristics that have always been associated, in the collective imagination, of what has been called *the concentration camp universe of galleys*⁹. And, along with all this, the prospect of a life (or, at least, of many years) doomed to extreme risk and the constant fear of perishing in a naval clash or through the ever treacherous conditions of the sea.

Authoritative studies, over the years, have followed on to illustrate what were the main organisation habits of rowing fleets. Construction techniques were described, command structures, types of recruitment

⁸ B. Bennassar, L. Bennassar, *I cristiani di Allah. La straordinaria epopea dei convertiti all'islamismo nei secoli XVI e XVII*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1991 (ed. or.: *Les Chrétiens d'Allah. L'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVIe-XVIIe siècles*, Perrin, Paris, 1989); E.N. Rothman, *Becoming Venetian: Conversion and Transformation in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean*, «Mediterranean Historical Review», 21, 1, 2006, pp. 39-75; G. Fiume, *Schiavitù e conversioni nel Mediterraneo*, «Quaderni Storici», 126, 2007, p. 3; P.C. Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri. Conversioni a Venezia e nel Friuli veneto in età moderna*, Olschki, Firenze, 2008.

⁹ L. Valensi, *Stranieri familiari. Musulmani in Europa (XVI-XVIII secolo)*, Einaudi, Torino, 2013 (ed. or. *Ces étrangers familiers. Musulmans en Europe (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2012), p. 121.

for rowers; this not only with regard to the Venetian fleet, but also for the Ottoman, French, Spanish, Tuscan and Maltese fleets, which were the main users, alongside the corsair fleets of the Maghreb, of fast rowing ships. It was also well explained how the navies on the two shores of the Mediterranean were able to obtain the *human engine*, those around 150/200 rowers, essential for the mobility of each galley¹⁰.

The outcome of this analysis led to establish that the Republic of Venice, over the centuries in which it employed galleys, preferred to resort to the use of free rowers, and only secondarily to men sentenced to the oar. In addition to the above two categories, the Venetian fleet used in large numbers those referred to generically in documents as *Turks* as rowers only in exceptional circumstances and specifically to meet the shortage of free rowers that afflicted Venice during the long conflicts against the Ottomans in the late 17th century and at the beginning of the next.

These *Turks* were, as we shall see below, of the most varied origin. Many were, strictly speaking, prisoners of war, captured during the frequent land or naval clashes; others, however, were civilians, rounded up during raids and landings specifically conducted in enemy territory; others more ended up in the hands of Christian corsairs, who had then sold them to the emissaries of the Republic for the urgent needs of the fleet.

The same thing could be said, conversely, for the Venetians and Venetian subjects who rowed on the ships of the Sultan or the Barbary city-states of the Maghreb. In contrast, however, to what has been seen for Venice, in these cases the volunteer rowers represented only a small percentage, because Christian slaves were precisely those which prevailed.

A further element, which is not only terminological but substantial, is thus to enrich the lexical variety already mentioned. It must in fact be specified that the Ottoman galley slaves (or, more generally, the Muslim slaves on the galleys of Venice) were not always identified with the term of *slaves* in the official language of the light Venetian navy. A survey conducted by L. Lo Basso on Venetian sources showed how sometimes the preference was to play on the ambiguous semantic

¹⁰ M. Fontenay, *Chiourmes turques au XVIIe siècle*, in R. Ragosta, *Le genti del mare Mediterraneo*, Atti del Colloquio Int.le di Storia Marittima, II, Pironti, Napoli, 1982, pp. 877-903; M. Fontenay, *L'esclave galerien dans la Méditerranée des temps modernes*, in H. Bresc, *Figures de l'esclave au Moyen Age et dans le monde moderne*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1996, pp. 115-143; A. Zysberg, *Les galériens. Vies et destins de 60.000 forçats sur les galères de France (1680-1748)*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1987; M. Aymard, *La leva marittima*, in A. Tenenti, U. Tucci, *Storia di Venezia*, XII, *Il mare*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 1991, pp. 435-480; S. Bono, *Schiavi musulmani nell'Italia moderna. Galeotti, vu' cumprà, domestici*, ESI, Napoli, 1999; L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo. Galee e galeotti del Mediterraneo in età moderna*, Selene, Milano, 2003; M. Lomas Cortés, *L'esclave captif sur les galères d'Espagne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, «Cahiers de la Méditerranée», 87, 2013, pp. 17-31; A. Pelizza, *Riammessi a respirare l'aria tranquilla* cit., pp. 13-23.

value of the generic name of *Turk*; the latter, in the view of the men of the *Serenissima*, suited better than *slave* for the prisoners of war, who were in the situation of being employed at the oar, but who were then theoretically susceptible to a free return to freedom in the case of an end to hostilities¹¹.

Moreover, even the process of liberation and mutual exchange of prisoners, at the end of hostilities, was far from unique and linear. The interest of the powers and especially the navies involved, in fact, was clearly to delay as much as possible the release of valuable and useful rowers, at least until the fleet had begun to demobilise, to be resized to the smaller proportions of peacetime. With respect to the time of the signing of diplomatic agreements, therefore, the actual return home of those concerned could be delayed even for many years, if not periods of five years and even decades¹².

4. A question of numbers

But how many, indeed, were the Venetian and Ottoman galley slaves respectively used by the adversary? An overall calculation, covering a total of the three centuries of the modern age, does not seem simple, especially since not all those captured were employed aboard the galleys. It is nevertheless possible to exhibit some significant data, for the one and for the other part.

The *Serenissima*, it was said, was found to have a large number of *Turks* especially during times of war. After the battle of Lepanto, for example, nearly half of the 4000 Ottomans captured by the Holy League were attributed to the Venetian government; then, in addition to more occasional contingencies, «the presence of Turkish rowers was almost constant between 1645 and 1721». Between the middle of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the next century, in fact, in the historic period marked by the endless wars of Candia and Morea, the percentage of *Turks* at the oar on Venetian galleys varied – as was calculated – by 5% in 1651 (352 rowers in a total of 7120) to 22.5% in 1663 (1463 of 6471), up to 7.5% in 1714 (287 of 3821)¹³.

The number of Venetians and Venetian subjects present in captivity in the vast Islamic world between the sixteenth and eighteenth cen-

¹¹ L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo* cit., pp. 163-164.

¹² A. Pelizza, *Alla fine del conflitto. Riscattati e redentori veneziani nel primo Settecento*, in H. Grieser, N. Priesching, *Gefangenensloskauf im Mittelmeerraum. Ein interreligiöser Vergleich*, Olms, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York, 2015, pp. 213-233.

¹³ A. Barbero, *Lepanto. La battaglia dei tre imperi*, Laterza, Bari, 2010, p. 594; Ioly Zorattini, *I nomi degli altri* cit., p. 252; L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo* cit., pp. 50, 162-170.

turies can, on the other hand, be reconstructed with fair approximation due to the fact that the bodies specifically called upon to deal with the redemption of the same would compile specific lists of names. The main organization concerned was, as mentioned, the magistrate of the three *Provveditori sopra ospedali e luoghi pii e riscatto degli schiavi*. It was in charge, from the last quarter of the sixteenth century, of collecting and managing the funds and public and private donations for the purpose. As well as this, a special brotherhood was also active, dedicated to the Trinity¹⁴. The *Provveditori*, to keep their own lists updated, constantly requested data and information on compatriots in captivity from the Venetian ambassadors and military leaders in the Levant, or foreign diplomats or members of religious orders. In this way it was ascertained that between the end of the sixteenth century, when a peak was detected of around 2500/3000 persons throughout the Ottoman Empire, and the years around 1730, when instead the number concerned stood between 500 and 600, the average of those identified through the various sources as Venetian slaves still remained high¹⁵.

5. Venetians rowing for the Ottoman Turks

The documentary evidence helps to describe the phenomenon, providing immediate feedback. Among the considerable material – specifically Venetian – that could have been chosen to complement this text, some of that selected, with no pretence of being systematic, has appeared particularly significant, because it includes rare eyewitness reports.

These, as well as illustrating in general the onerous vicissitudes of those rowing the galleys, can also help reduce the cliché that has two fronts, one Christian and one Islamic, always tightly aligned and engaged, without *nuances*, in head-on clashes. These *nuances*, as we shall now see, nevertheless existed, and the religious and political boundaries, in the Mediterranean of the modern age, faded into a much more complex relationship.

¹⁴ A. Pelizza, *Una confraternita veneziana per il riscatto degli schiavi (1604-1797)*. *La Scuola della santissima Trinità in Santa Maria Formosa*, in S. Hanss, J. Schiel, *Mediterranean slavery revisited (500-1800)* cit., pp. 275-307.

¹⁵ The Senate received from the bailo – the venetian ambassador – in Constantinople, Lorenzo Bernardo, information on the presence of 2,500 slaves from Veneto in Istanbul in 1588, and, based on this, resolved, on 3 June of that year, to definitively appoint the *Provveditori sopra ospedali e luoghi pii* to deal with the matter: Asve, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar*, filza 100 e reg. 49; for the eighteenth century: *Senato, Deliberazioni, Terra*, filza 1684: scrittura dei *Provveditori sopra monasteri* al Senato, 1728 (1727 m.v.) gen. 16, all. alla deliberazione 1728 gen. 24; *Senato, Deliberazioni, Terra*, filza 1708: scrittura dei *Provveditori sopra monasteri* 1729 mag. 27, all. alla deliberazione 1729 giu. 2; A. Pelizza, *Riammessi a respirare l'aria tranquilla* cit., pp. 124, 343.

The raids carried out periodically by corsairs along the coast are a well-known chapter of the history of the Mediterranean, and the Venetian territories were certainly not excluded. In 1591, in the midst of a long period of peace between Venice and the Sublime Porte, 14 Barbary galleys, lacking rowers, organized a violent raid against the Dalmatian islands belonging to Venice, abducting more than 200 men, few of whom were ever able to return home. Such raids consistently increased the ranks of *galley slaves*: in June 1624, for example, more than 450 residents of the territory of Perasto were captured and forcibly transported to Algiers and Tunis, where almost all died through hardship and toil; in 1682 there appeared to be between 500 and 600 Venetian slaves in Algiers¹⁶.

From the towns of the North African coast the slaves often sent out requests for help and economic aid to their family members or to the authorities of the *Serenissima*. Managing these contacts wisely was more than necessary, if you wanted to have any hope of getting the funds needed for redemption. But keeping these channels open, due to the remoteness and lack of reliable negotiators, was by no means simple, and again in 1658 the Venetian authorities denounced that «quelli che restano in schiavitù in Algeri siano quasi del tutto privi dei mezzi di far correre gl'avvisi della loro disavventura a' suoi più stretti interessati» (those who remain in slavery in Algiers are almost completely devoid of the means of sending notice of their misadventure to those most closely concerned)¹⁷.

At the end of 1609, peace enduring between the Sublime Porte and the Venetian Republic, many of the incidents that troubled relations between the two states were derived from the strong tension caused by the activities of the corsairs of North Africa and the resulting *maritime police* operations of the Venetian ships. Several cases can be recalled, but would lead too far from the topic. By way of example, one can however mention the case of the Venetian noble Giovanni (*Zuanne*)

¹⁶ The first data in A. Tenenti, *Venezia e i corsari: 1580-1615*, Laterza, Bari, 1961, p. 40. For the territory of Perasto and the report on the raid: Asve, *Collegio, Relazioni*, b. 3: relazione di Giovanni Battista Salvago; the report of Giovanni Battista Salvago is published in A. Sacerdoti, *Africa ovvero Barbaria». Relazione al Doge di Venezia sulle Reggenze di Algeri e di Tunisi del dragomanno Gio. Batta Salvago (1625)*, Cedam, Padova, 1937. For the data on the presence in Algiers in 1682: Biblioteca del Civico Museo Correr di Venezia, Ms. *Morosini Grimani*, b. 515, c. 77: report of the former slave Antonio Tealdi Barbarella, of Castelfranco; R.C. Davis, *Counting European Slaves on the Barbary Coast, «Past and Present»*, 172, 2001, pp. 87-124, in particular p. 106.

¹⁷ Some letters requesting help sent by Venetian slaves to relatives residing in the *Serenissima* have been published in A. Tenenti, *Gli schiavi di Venezia alla fine del Cinquecento*, in «Rivista storica italiana», a. LXVII, I, 1955, pp. 52-69, in particular p. 55. For notes on the difficulties of communication between North Africa and Venice: Asve, *Provveditori sopra ospedali e luoghi pii*, b. 102, terminazione 1658 maggio 27; A. Pelizza, *Riammessi a respirare l'aria tranquilla* cit., pp. 130-132.

Pasqualigo di Antonio, boarded by corsairs from Tripoli on his ship in the summer of that year, who remained in captivity until July 1611. In the months following his capture by Turgut rais (*Drogut* in Venetian sources), he had been forced to row in the galleys of Tripoli, from which he had managed to send his request for help: since he was a Venetian patrician, the bodies of the Republic had mobilised with particular energy in an attempt to obtain his release. The *bailo* in Constantinople, Simone Contarini, a circumspect and shrewd politician, had immediately raised the issue at the highest level, using tones from time to time conciliatory or exasperated before the Ottoman rulers. On one of these occasions, during a conversation with the *kapudanpaşa*, supreme commander of the imperial fleet, Contarini remarked the plight of many of his fellow citizens, despite the fact that nominally peace was ruling: «Da 3 anni in qua ci eran state da corsari tolte cinque navi, con più di tre milione d'oro di valsente, et che adesso i nostri gentilhuomini venetiani vogavano, rasi la barba, al remo nelle galeotte di quella diabolica gente» (In the last three years corsairs have taken five ships from us, worth more than three million gold coins, and now our Venetian noblemen, their beards shaved, row at the oar in galleys of that evil people)¹⁸.

If conflict then officially broke out between Venice and Istanbul, prisoners of war as well were to extend this sad company, and they were largely intended precisely for the oar. In July 1584 the Venetian Senate received a request for help from 26 former soldiers, once engaged in the war of Cyprus and forced to surrender by the Ottomans on the island, or in clashes at Antivari and Ulcinj: «Dappoi che facessimo tutto quello che a noi era possibile per diffenderli, alfine per le misere revolutioni di essi fussimo fatti schiavi» (Although we did everything that was possible to defend them, finally because of what happened we were enslaved). In the following years, most of them had been sent to row, and had remained in that condition long after the end of hostilities:

Nella qual servitù siamo statti sin all'hora presente, che è circa anni 14, et habbiamo sopportato quelli tormenti et fatiche che imaginar si può vostra serenità, si nel tirar il remo nemico come altre fatiche insopportabili, le qual vogliamo tacerle per non attediarla.

(In which servitude we were to the present day, for about 14 years, and we have endured those torments and hardships that you can imagine, your serene highness, both in pulling the enemy oar as in other unbearable hardships, which we do not wish to mention, so as not to cause you bother).

¹⁸ Asve, *Senato, Dispacci, Costantinopoli*, filza 68, c. 469v: dispaccio 1609 dicembre 12 (2°). On the story of Pasqualigo: A. Pelizza, "Restituirsi in libertà et alla patria". *Riscatti di schiavi a Venezia tra XVI e XVIII secolo*, «Quaderni Storici», 140, 2012, pp. 341-383. On the danger which corsairs represented to Venetian navigation in the early seventeenth century: A. Tenenti, *Venezia e i corsari: 1580-1615* cit.

Their misadventures had ended through the intervention of the *bailo* Gianfrancesco Morosini, who had managed to secure their release and had brought them to Venice. Here, recognising their condition of poverty and the fact that they were impoverished for having served the Republic, the Senate had allocated 100 ducats for the benefit of all¹⁹.

As for the second half of the seventeenth century, in a period of almost uninterrupted hostility, it was estimated that between 1645 and 1669 and again between 1684 and 1699, «the number of enslaved soldiers and Venetian subjects» in the Venetian territories in Dalmatia and in the Mouths of Kotor during conflicts with the forces of the Sultan amounted to just under 4000 individuals²⁰.

6. Ottoman Turks rowing for the Venetians

Exactly symmetrical, as has been said, was the situation of the Ottomans in Venetian hands. Many episodes occurred over a period of time, documented by letters, protests and petitions. Between 1528 and 1529, for example, the Aga, that is the military commander in chief, of Castel Tornese (Chlemoutsi, in the Peloponnese), wrote to the Venetian *provveditore* of Zante, complaining about the attitude of the inhabitants of that place, who led the Christian corsairs to capture Ottoman subjects, although there was no conflict under way, in order to capture slaves for rowing²¹. Thirty years later, in observance of the peace agreements, the *provveditore all'armata* of the Venetian navy, the well-known Cristoforo da Canal, gave back to those appointed by the Sultan eight of his subjects (including Spanish and Sicilian *renegados*), captured on corsair ships, and that for this «nelle galie [...] si ritrovavano alla cattena» (were kept chained in the galleys). A similar episode in 1591, involving the *provveditore* in Kefalonia Davide Bembo,

¹⁹ Asve, *Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar*, filza 87: deliberazione 1584 luglio 27, con allegata supplica. On the freeing of slaves achieved in those years by the *bailo*, all regularly recorded: A. Tenenti, *Schiavi e corsari nel Mediterraneo orientale intorno al 1585*, in *Miscellanea in onore di Roberto Cessi*, II, Ed. di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1958, p. 183; G. Ploumidis, *Απελευθέρωση σκλάβων στα τέλη του 16. αιώνα (Apeleutherosi sklavon sta teli tou 16. Aiona - Riscatto di schiavi- Fine sec. XVI)*, «Δωδώνη - Dodoni», 33, 2004, pp. 13-24; G. Ploumidis, *Νέα έγγραφα για την απελευθέρωση των σκλάβων (τέλη 16. αι.) (Nea engrafa ghia tin apeleutherosi ton sklavon (teli 16.ai) - Nuovi documenti sul riscatto di schiavi - fine sec. XVI)*, «Δωδώνη - Dodoni», 34, 2005, pp. 13-49: both articles with a summary in Italian and editing documents written in Italian; E.R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople. Nation, identity and coexistence in the early modern Mediterranean*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp. 31, 72.

²⁰ M. Jačov, *Le guerre veneto-turche del XVII secolo in Dalmazia*, Venezia, «Atti e Memorie della Società Dalmata di Storia Patria», 20, 1991, pp. 225-233.

²¹ Asve, *Documenti turchi*, b. 2, n. 244, in Greek; M.P. Pedani, *I "documenti turchi" dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Inventario della miscellanea*, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, Roma, 1994, p. 67.

the Ottoman Sanjak of Morea and eight subjects of the Sublime Porte, removed from the galleys²².

Sometimes the central authorities in Istanbul addressed Venice to obtain the repatriation of their subjects, forced to work on the ships of the *Serenissima*. In 1558 even the Sultan, Suleiman I, wrote to the Doge Lorenzo Priuli; informed that Venetian ships called in the ports of Syria with Muslims chained to the oars («captivi musulmani che tiravano li remi»: Muslim captives pulling oars), the monarch demanded their immediate remission in freedom, and asked the Doge if he was aware of this blatant violation of the chapters of peace.

The same thing happened in 1625, when the doge Giovanni Corner was asked – given the good relations existing between the two states – to have twelve men freed as soon as possible, who for more than three years, after many vicissitudes, rowed on the galleys of the Republic²³. In these cases, to avoid complications that could precipitate troublesome relations with the Sublime Porte, it was the custom of the Venetian Senate to exercise extreme diplomatic caution and settle disputes as soon as possible.

There were also many incidents of forced seizure of rowers carried out by the Venetian troops in enemy territory during wartime. The work of Alessandro Locatelli, dedicated in 1691 to the grand Venetian campaign in Greece – to name just one example – is full of references in this sense²⁴. Among them we can recall at least one, resounding example, of Mystras (Mistrà, a town not far from the ancient Sparta, surrendering after a long siege), where the 2400 inhabitants, guilty – according to the Venetians – of not having lived up to the agreements of capitulation, were entirely deported, and nearly 800 of them, males between sixteen and fifty years old, were destined to the oar²⁵.

It should not be thought, according to the established schemes, that captivity was to concern only the subjects of the Sultan of the Islamic

²² Asve, *Documenti turchi*, b. 6, n. 738; b. 8, n. 1019; M.P. Pedani, *I "documenti turchi"* cit., pp. 185, 258. On Cristoforo da Canal, the famous theorist of the reform of the Venetian *armata sottile* and author of the treatise *Della milizia marittima*: U. Tucci, voce *Canal, Cristoforo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, XVII, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994, pp. 640-643.

²³ For the first episode, Asve, *Secreta, Lettere e scritture turchesche*, filza II, n. 50; M.P. Pedani, *Inventory of the "Lettere e scritture Turchesche" of the Venetian State Archives*, Brill, Leiden, 2010, p. 24. For the second episode, Asve, *Documenti turchi*, b. 12, n. 1329; M.P. Pedani, *I "documenti turchi"* cit., p. 351.

²⁴ A. Locatelli, *Racconto storico della veneta guerra in Levante diretta dal valore del serenissimo principe Francesco Morosini capitano generale la terza volta per la serenissima Repubblica di Venetia contro l'Impero ottomano*, Albrizzi, Colonia [ma Venezia], 1691, pp. II, 46, 281, 282.

²⁵ K.M. Setton, *Venice, Austria and the Turks in the Seventeenth Century*, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 343; L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo* cit., p. 166; A. Pelizza, *Riammessi a respirare l'aria tranquilla* cit., p. 18.

faith. Even Orthodox Christians, Greeks or Slavs, were often susceptible to capture, most of the time precisely to be used as galley slaves²⁶. The reduction of the inhabitants to this form of slavery was therefore not an accident, but a stated requirement²⁷. During the first phase of the war of Candia, on 21 July, 1647, the nobleman Marco Contarini, *inquisitor in Armata*, responsible for evaluating any arbitrariness committed by the Venetian commanders, thus informed the Senate from his galley sailing near Nafplion (*Napoli di Romania*):

Serenissimo prencipe, mia parte non è andare cercando se il far schiavi le gente sudite al re inimico, se il levarle le loro sostanze, cosi nelle loro proprie habitationi, come nelle *saiche* et vasselli, sia delitto o operatione laudabile; io non devo pensar più oltre che a servir l'eccellenze vostre in quello che mi hanno comesso.

(Most serene prince, my part is not to go looking if making slaves of the people who are subjects of the enemy king, if taking their property, so in their dwellings, as in the *saiche* and vessels, is a crime or a praiseworthy operation; I should not think beyond serving your Excellencies in what I have been entrusted to do).

Contarini had been entrusted the previous January by the Senate with the task of conducting an investigation to see if among other things the *galley slaves* taken on board *di publica ragione* to row on Venetian ships, at the time under the control of the *provveditore generale da mar* Girolamo Morosini, were instead unduly set free, in exchange for unlawful compensation, by the commanders of the ships²⁸.

To conduct his investigation, the patrician had proceeded to personally interview, besides leaders and soldiers of the Venetian navy, also many of those captured, whether Greek Christians or Muslims. The latter were made to swear by the formula «Confirmavit et iuravit de veritate per legem Macmetis»: proof that the Islamic *galley slaves* on Venetian ships were allowed some freedom of religious practice. The Senate was then given their voice and their evidence.

From the latter it was found that many times, between 1645 and 1646, Ottoman transport ships had been boarded and their crews and

²⁶ M. Jačov, *La vendita di schiavi slavi cristiani in città italiane durante la guerra di Candia (1645-1669)*, «Rivista Dalmatica», 61, II, 1990, pp. 123-131; G. Boccadamo, *Napoli e l'Islam. Storie di musulmani, schiavi e rinnegati in età moderna*, D'Auria, Napoli, 2010, p. 206.

²⁷ B.J. Slot, *Archipelagus turbatus. Les Cyclades entre colonisation latine et occupation ottomane c. 1500-1718*, I, Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, Istanbul, 1982, pp. 162-192; L. Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo cit.*, p. 165; E. Ginio, *Piracy and redemption in the Aegean Sea during the first half of the Eighteenth century*, «Turcica», 33, 2001, pp. 135-147.

²⁸ Asve, *Miscellanea materie miste notabili*, b. 148: *Dispaccio originale n. 24 di Marco Contarini inquisitor in Armata e Processo formato per commissione dell'ecc.mo Senato*.

passengers enslaved; but above all had been enslaved several hundred (perhaps nearly a thousand) inhabitants of the islands of the Cyclades – in particular Argintiera, Sifanto, Paro and Milo (i.e. Kimolos, Sifnos, Paros and Milos) –, carried away by the troops under the command of M. de La Vallette, a French nobleman in the service of Venice, which had landed specially. According to the dramatic account of a witness, «li soldati venero alle nostre case, ne presero, et ne portorono via tutte le robbe, et ne lasciorono cosi (mostrando le mani aperte)» (the soldiers came to our homes, took us and removed all our things, and left us like this: showing open hands)²⁹.

In the latter case, the only opportunity to regain freedom had presented itself – so the outcome of the survey – only before the unfortunate people were distributed between the commanders of the ships. Those who had sufficient cash to redeem themselves, in fact, were then released by the captains of the same militias who had requisitioned them (mostly French) and returned to the wives, who had gone «a piangere le sue miserie alle gallerie» (to the galleys to mourn their grief). The money was then divided between the officers of La Vallette. Among those – having no ability to pay – that were actually taken on board and assigned to the oar, none was found to be ever freed again, whether for nothing or by paying a fee; and if the amount of slaves still in service appeared to be small in relation to the number of those captured, this was due, according to the results of the investigation, to the high number of deaths on board, not to nonexistent release. Many slaves, in fact, died within a year of embarkation, for

li patimenti della galea, il travaglio d'esser fuori di casa, di haver perso la robba, la moglie, i figli, il non haver da mangiar se non il biscotto, il beber per un mese se non acqua, che poi le fu dato il vino³⁰.

(The sufferings of the galley, the travail of being away from home, of having lost their possessions, their wives, their children, from having nothing but biscuit to eat, nothing to drink for a month but water, after which wine was dispensed).

²⁹ Asve, *Miscellanea materie miste notabili*, b. 148: *Dispaccio originale n. 24 di Marco Contarini inquisitor in Armata e Processo formato per commissione dell'ecc.mo Senato*, c. 11v: statement by Marco della Suda, a Greek Christian captured in Paros.

³⁰ Asve, *Miscellanea materie miste notabili*, b. 148: *Dispaccio originale n. 24 di Marco Contarini inquisitor in Armata e Processo formato per commissione dell'ecc.mo Senato*, cc. 1-3v: statement by Caterino Corner, former *sopracomito*, feb. 1647.

7. Conclusion

Given the limits of this work, certainly no claim is made of having outlined an exhaustive comparative picture of life in captivity of the *galley slaves* on Venetian and Ottoman ships, assessed, in all its many aspects, in the broader context of *Mediterranean slavery*.

In the comparison of some selected documentary sources, however, it has been possible to observe how, for the one and for the other, the methods of capture were equivalent, the hard life on board similar and the sad conditions in peace and in war shared. An attempt has thus been made to emphasize the many similarities and many correspondences between the existence of the Ottoman galley slaves on board Venetian ships and the Venetian galley slaves on board the ships of the Sultan, in a general theatre, that of the Mediterranean in the centuries of the modern age, deeply troubled by conflict and adversity.

Conflicts that nevertheless should not cause the reader to forget, however, how the inland sea maintained itself, in any event, by irreplaceable communication and commerce, and as the contacts and interests between its *two shores* never entirely ceased to continue, even in moments of fiercest confrontation.

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